

Message Text

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SUBJECT: ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI'S VISIT TO CUBA

REF: ROME 4183

SUMMARY: IN TEN-DAY STAY IN CUBA AS GUEST OF LOCAL HIERARCHY, ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI ABLE VISIT ALL SIX CUBAN DIOCESES AND MEET UNOFFICIALLY WITH HIGHEST LEVELS GOC. SHORTAGE OF CLERGY AND STATUS OF CATHOLICS IN SOCIALIST CUBA ONLY BILATERAL THEMES TOUCHED ON IN GENERAL MANNER WITH GOC. CASAROLI VIEWED HIS VISIT AS GREAT BOOST TO MORALE OF CUBAN CATHOLICS. ONLY MENTIONS OF US WAS ROA'S REMARK THAT CUBA COULD NOT CONSIDER IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS UNLESS US LIFTS ITS EMBARGO. END SUMMARY.

1. ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI, VATICAN "FOREIGN MINISTER," RECEIVED ILLING APRIL 10 AND PROVIDED BRIEFING ON HIS TEN-DAY VISIT TO CUBA AS GUEST OF LOCAL BISHOPS WHO HAD INVITED HIM AND WHO HAD ARRANGED NECESSARY CLEARANCES WITH GOC. DURING HIS STAY, CASAROLI WAS ABLE TO TRAVEL FREELY THROUGHOUT ISLAND, VISITING ALL SIX DIOCESES AND MEETING MOST OF 200-ODD MEMBERS CUBAN CLERGY. HE SAID HE WAS WARMLY RECEIVED WHEREEVER HE WENT AND BELIEVED HIS VISIT EXTREMELY USEFUL IN PULLING UP SPIRITS OF CUBAN CLERGY AND CATHOLICS IN GENERAL. FACT THAT HE MET WITH HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, HE SAID, ALSO CONVINCED CUBAN CATHOLICS THAT

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CHURCH STILL CARRIES CONSIDERABLE WEIGHT IN CUBA AND THAT GOVERN-

MENT TAKES NOTICE OF IT. ALTHOUGH VISIT COMPLETELY PRIVATE IN NATURE, CUBAN OFFICIALS MADE SPECIAL EFFORT TO BE ATTENTIVE TO CASAROLI, WHO WAS SURPRISED TO BE GREETED ON ARRIVAL BY DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER AND, ON FOLLOWING DAY, TO HAVE MEETING WITH *9438&, 8,8 534 49-. AN ADDITIONAL UNEXPECTED TOUCH WAS ROA'S PRESENCE AT AIRPORT ON CASAROLI'S DEPARTURE. CASAROLI HAD LENGTHY DISCUSSION WITH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER RODRIGUEZ WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS CUBA'S LEADING IDEOLOGUE, PRESIDENT DORTICOS AND, MOST SIGNIFICANTLY, A 90-MINUTE MEETING WITH FIDEL CASTRO.

2. ALTHOUGH A MEETING WITH CASTRO IS ALWAYS A POSSIBILITY FOR A HIGH LEVEL FOREIGN VISITOR, CASAROLI SAID, HE WAS NEVER REALLY SURE IT WOULD MATERIALIZE UNTIL END. ARRIVING HOME AT 2300 AFTER CELEBRATING MASS IN HAVANA CATHEDRAL, CASAROLI AND ZACCHI WERE SURPRISED BY TELEPHONE CALL FROM CASTRO SAYING HE WOULD BE BY IN ABOUT HALF AN HOUR. DISCUSSION WAS MOSTLY GENERAL, BUT COVERED SPECIFIC SUBJECTS OF INTEREST TO CHURCH SUCH AS INSUFFICIENT NUMBER OF PRIESTS AND STATUS OF CATHOLICS IN CUBAN SOCIALIST SOCIETY. REPEATING WHAT RODRIGUEZ HAD TOLD CASAROLI EARLIER, CASTRO SAID IT WAS GOVERNMENT'S WISH THAT CATHOLICS CONSIDER THEMSELVES FULL MEMBERS OF CUBAN SOCIETY AND THAT, AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED, THE ONLY THING A PRACTICING CATHOLIC COULD NOT DO WOULD BE TO BECOME A PARTY MEMBER. ALTHOUGH CASTRO DID NOT SAY SO OUTRIGHT, IMPLICIT IN HIS REMARKS WAS CONVICTION THAT MOST CATHOLICS HAD VOLUNTARILY WITHDRAWN THEMSELVES FROM FULL PARTICIPATION IN CUBAN SOCIETY RATHER THAN AS A RESULT OF PRESSURE FROM GOVERNMENT. CASAROLI NOTED THAT IN ALL OF HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS THEY SUBTLY ATTEMPTED TO PUT BLAME ON CATHOLICS FOR WITHDRAWING FROM ACTIVE ROLE AS CITIZENS. CASAROLI REALIZES, HOWEVER, GOC ASSURANCES TO CONTRARY, A PRACTICING CHRISTIAN IS OF NECESSITY A SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN IN CUBA AS WELL AS IN OTHER SOCIALIST SOCIETIES.

3. CASAROLI NOTED THAT IT WILL TAKE A LONG TIME TO REMEDY CRYING NEED FOR CLERGY IN CUBA EVEN THOUGH SEMINARIES HAVE MORE STUDENTS TODAY THAN IN PAST. PART OF PROBLEM IS HISTORICAL SINCE CUBAN CHURCH, UNTIL CASTRO, RELIED PREDOMINANTLY ON FOREIGN CLERGY, ESPECIALLY SPANIARDS. HE RECALLED THAT 2800 SPANISH CLERGY HAD DEPARTED IN ONE BLOW ON THE SHIP COVADONGA IN 1961. ALTHOUGH
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PRESSURE WAS PUT ON THESE PRIESTS TO GO, SPECTACULAR WAY THEY LEFT WAS A BLOW TO GOC IMAGE AND SELF-RESPECT. BEST HOPE IN LONG RUN IS TO TRAIN A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF CUBAN PRIESTS FOR THEY ARE PROBABLY ONLY ONES WHO, AS A GROUP, CAN ADAPT THEMSELVES SATISFACTORILY TO LIVING CONDITIONS IN CUBA. VERY FEW FOREIGN MISSIONARIES ARE ABLE LONG TO ENDURE WHAT CASAROLI DESCRIBED AS DREARY, OPPRESSIVE AND DIFFICULT CUBAN LIFE. IF FOREIGN CLERGY DEPART SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVAL, GOC IS BOUND TO INTERPRET THIS AS AN INSULT TO REGIME. GOC ASSURED CASAROLI THAT HIS REQUEST TO

KEEP NUMBER OF CLERGY FROM FALLING BELOW PRESENT LEVEL BY ALLOWING MORE FOREIGNERS IN WOULD BE WEIGHED SYMPATHETICALLY.

4. CASAROLI DID NOT RAISE SUBJECT OF CONFISCATED CHURCH PROPERTY, OBSERVING THAT IT IS UNTHINKABLE AT THIS POINT THAT GOC WOULD RETURN SCHOOLS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS TO CHURCH, AND, MOREOVER, CHURCH WOULD BE UNABLE TO STAFF THEM IF THEY DID GET THEM BACK. OF MASSES OF FOREIGN CLERGY WHO DEPARTED IN EARLY DAYS OF CASTRO REGIME, AT LEAST TWO-THIRDS WERE ENGAGED IN TEACHING AND HOSPITAL WORK. BY SOME STRANGE OVERSIGHT HOSPITAL BROTHER OF ST. JOHN OF GOD STILL MAINTAIN TWO HOSPITALS IN CUBA, AND ONE ORDER OF NUNS HAS ANOTHER INSTITUTION, ALTHOUGH EACH OF THESE THREE ESTABLISHMENTS HAS ONLY 3 OR 4 RELIGIOUS PERSONNEL.

5. ONE OF CUBAN BISHOPS' MAJOR CONCERNS WAS THAT MANY OF THEIR SMALL ACTS OF "COOPERATION" WITH GOVERNMENT MIGHT BE OFFENSIVE TO HOLY SEE AND CASAROLI'S VISIT WAS USEFUL IN CONVINCING THEM THAT HOLY SEE ENTIRELY SUPPORTED CUBAN CHURCH'S PRESENT ATTITUDE TOWARD GOVERNMENT. SOME CHURCHMEN HAD BEEN ENCOURAGING BISHOPS TO TAKE A MORE POLEMICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD GOVERNMENT AND ADAMANTLY TO REFUSE ANY GESTURES OF COOPERATION OR FRATERNIZATION IN ORDER "TO PLEASE THE VATICAN". MSGR. ZACCHI, VATICAN CHARGE' D'AFFAIRES HAD BEEN REASSURING BISHOPS THAT THEIR POSITION WAS CORRECT ONE AND THEY SHOULD CONTINUE ALONG THESE LINES, BUT ONLY ON HEARING THIS FROM CASAROLI WERE THEY REALLY ASSURED THAT VATICAN APPROVED. CASAROLI FEELS THAT THIS REASSURANCE HAS DONE MUCH TO STRENGTHEN BISHOPS' MORALE. HOPEFULLY, HIS TALKS WITH GOC WILL ALSO MODIFY PRESENT OFFICIAL VIEW THAT ANY ACTS OF COOPERATION FROM CHURCH ARE MERELY OPPORTUNISM OF A SINISTER ORDER WHICH MASK INSIDIOUS ANTI-GOVERNMENT POLICY. FOR EXAMPLE, FOR LAST TWO YEARS BISHOPS HAVE BEEN SENDING SEMINARIANS TO CUT SUGAR CANE FOR ONE MONTH, A POSITION THEY FEARED WOULD BE DISTASTEFUL TO POPE. CASAROLI

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ASSURED THEM THIS WAS RIGHT THING TO DO AND SHOULD BE INTERPRETED NOT AS A PRO-REGIME GESTURE BUT AS A NORMAL DUTY TO CUBAN SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.

6. IN RESPONSE TO OUR QUESTION ABOUT WHETHER CUBAN RELATIONS WITH US AROSE, CASAROLI SAID THAT HE DID, IN DISCUSSION WITH ROA, ASK GENERAL QUESTION ABOUT HOW CUBAN RELATIONS WERE DEVELOPING WITH CO

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